THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 1993

United Nations Children's Fund
(UNICEF)

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A Summary

The following is a summary of the 1993 State of the World's Children *report, issued by James P. Grant, the Executive Director of UNICEF. For details of the full report, please see page 12.*

Amid all the problems of a world bleeding from continuing wars and environmental wounds, it is nonetheless becoming clear that one of the greatest of all human aspirations is now within reach. Within a decade, it should be possible to bring to an end the age-old evils of child malnutrition, preventable disease, and widespread illiteracy.

As an indication of how close that goal might be, the financial cost can be put at about $25 billion a year.* That is the UNICEF estimate of the extra resources required to put into practice today's low-cost strategies for protecting the world's children. Specifically, it is an estimate of the cost of controlling the major childhood diseases, halving the rate of child malnutrition, bringing clean water and safe sanitation to all communities, making family planning services universally available, and providing almost every child with at least a basic education.

In practice, financial resources are a necessary but not sufficient prerequisite for meeting these basic needs. Sustained political commitment and a great deal of managerial competence are even more important. Yet it is necessary to reduce this challenge to the denominator of dollars in order to dislodge the idea that abolishing the worst aspects of poverty is a task too vast to be attempted or too expensive to be afforded.

To put the figure of $25 billion in perspective, it is considerably less than the amount the Japanese Government has allocated this year to the building of a new highway from Tokyo to Kobe; it is two to three times as much as the cost of the tunnel soon to be opened between the United Kingdom and France; it is less than the cost of the Ataturk Dam complex now being constructed in eastern Turkey; it is a little more than Hong Kong proposes to spend on a new airport; it is about the same

* In 1990, UNICEF estimated at $20 billion a year the extra financial resources needed to meet health, nutrition, education, and water and sanitation goals agreed at the *World Summit for Children*. Estimates for the additional resources required to also meet family planning goals have since become available and this has increased the overall estimate to approximately $25 billion a year.

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as the support package that the Group of Seven has agreed on in 1992 for Russia alone; and it is significantly less than Europeans will spend this year on wine or Americans on beer.

Whatever the other difficulties may be, the time has therefore come to banish in shame the notion that the world cannot afford to meet the basic needs of almost every man, woman, and child for adequate food, safe water, primary health care, family planning, and a basic education.

A 10% effort

If so much could be achieved for so many at so little cost, then the public in both industrialized and developing countries might legitimately ask why it is not being done.

In part, the answer is the predictable one: meeting the needs of the poorest and the least politically influential has rarely been a priority of governments. Yet the extent of present neglect in the face of present opportunity is a scandal of which the public is largely unaware. On average, the governments of the developing world are today devoting little more than 10% of their budgets to directly meeting the basic needs of their people. More is still being spent on military capacity and on debt servicing than on health and education.

Perhaps more surprising still, less than 10% of all international aid for development is devoted to directly meeting these most obvious of human needs. And as total bilateral aid from the Western industrialized nations is now running at approximately $40 billion a year, this means the amount given for nutrition, primary health care, water and sanitation, primary education, and family planning, comes to about $4 billion a year. This is less than half as much as the aid-giving nations spend each year on sports shoes. It could therefore fairly be said that the problem today is not that overcoming the worst aspects of world poverty is too vast or too expensive a task; it is that it has not seriously been tried.

A watershed

With the beginning of the 1990s has come new hope that the age of neglect may be giving way to the age of concern.

The evidence for this new hope, amid all the seismic shifts in the political and economic landscape of recent years, is a series of quieter changes which have not made the nightly news but which have affected the daily lives of many millions of people.

The first of these changes is the entirely new priority that has been given to the task of immunizing the world's children. For a decade, national health services, UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO) and many thousands of individuals and organizations have struggled towards the goal of 80% immunization coverage in the developing world. In 1990, that goal was reached. The result is the saving of over 3 million children's lives each year, and the protection of many millions more from malnutrition, disease, and disability.

The significance of this achievement goes beyond these extraordinary statistics. Eighty per cent immunization means that approximately 100 million children are being reached by a modern medical technique on four or five separate occasions during their first year of life. As a logistical achievement, it is unprecedented; and it shows beyond any doubt that the outreach capacity now exists to put the basic benefits of scientific progress at the disposal of the vast majority of the world's poor.

Secondly, it demonstrates that progress can now be made towards basic social goals even by the poorest of developing countries. Over the last five years, immunization coverage has been lifted dramatically in many nations with per capita incomes of less than $500 a year.

Other advances in knowledge and technique are now lining up outside the door that immunization has unlocked. And the potential remains enormous. Thirty-five thousand children under five die in the developing world every day. Almost 60% of those deaths, and much of the world's illness and malnutrition, are caused by just three diseases - pneumonia, diarrhoea and measles - all of which can now be prevented or treated by means which are tried and tested, available and affordable.

Similarly, the vitamin A deficiency which threatens up to 10 million of the world's children with death, serious illness, and loss of eyesight, could now be brought under control at a cost which is negligible in relation to the benefits it would bring.

Or to take another example, the iodine deficiencies that lower the mental and physical abilities of up to a billion people and are the world's single biggest cause of mental retardation could also now be eliminated at a total cost of approximately $100 million - less than the cost of two modern fighter planes.

Even those aspects of poverty which have traditionally been considered the most expensive and the most logistically stubborn - the lack of adequate nutrition, safe water supply, and basic education - are also now becoming susceptible to a combination of new technologies, falling costs, and community-based strategies. The cost of providing clean water in Africa, for example, has been halved since the mid-1980s and now stands at an average figure of about $20 per person per year. Similarly, countries such as Bangladesh and Colombia have demonstrated that a basic, relevant education can be provided at a cost of approximately $20 per child per year. Equally large-scale trials in Africa and in India have shown that the incidence of child malnutrition can also now be halved at a cost of less than $10 per child per year.

New goals

These advances in technology and strategy, and the extraordinary potential they have revealed, were the principal concern of the *World Summit for Children* held at the United Nations in September 1990 - at about the same time as the immunization goal was being reached. The *Summit* was attended by approximately half the world's Presidents and Prime Ministers and resulted in a set of specific commitments which, if implemented, would indeed mark the beginning of a new era of concern.

Those commitments, designed to reflect the potential of the knowledge and the technologies now available, were expressed as a series of specific goals to be achieved by the end of the present century. These goals include: control of the major childhood diseases; a halving of child malnutrition; a one-third reduction in under-five death rates; a halving of maternal mortality rates; safe water and sanitation for all communities; universally available family planning services; and basic education for all children.

To give these commitments a more permanent purchase on political priority, the countries represented at the *Summit*, and the many more who have subsequently signed the *Declaration and Plan of Action*, also agreed to

draw up detailed national programmes for reaching the agreed goals. As of September 1992, such plans have been completed in over 50 countries and are nearing completion in 80 others. In June of 1992, the United Nations Secretary-General reported to the General Assembly that 31 countries have so far indicated they will restructure budgets to increase the proportion of government spending devoted to basic education, primary health care, nutrition, water, and sanitation.

The drawing up and financing of such plans is inevitably a bureaucratic process, and too much should not be expected too soon. But most nations have made a start towards keeping the promises that have been made to the world's children. Immunization levels have been sustained and in some cases, notably in China, lifted above the new goal of 90% (at which point very significant decreases in the incidence of disease can be expected). Polio has almost certainly been eradicated from Latin America and the Caribbean, where a year has now passed since the last confirmed case of the virus. Reported cases of the main vaccine-preventable diseases are declining and WHO believes there is a reasonable chance that the 1995 goal of eliminating neonatal tetanus will be met. Countries such as Bangladesh, Bolivia, Ecuador, Malawi, Namibia, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, and possibly Brazil have already begun serious efforts to halve the rate of malnutrition. Similarly, several countries are moving determinedly towards the goal of water and sanitation for all - including Bangladesh, Burundi, China, Ghana, India, Nigeria, Paraguay, the Sudan, Togo, Viet Nam, and virtually all the countries of Central America. And to achieve the *Summit* goal of empowering all families with today's knowledge about the importance of breastfeeding, hundreds of hospitals and maternity units have begun to change institutional policies and to use their enormous influence to reverse the trend towards the bottle-feeding of infants.

Not least, the promise of the *Summit* is being kept by the rapid spread of acceptance for the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which seeks to lay down minimum standards for the survival, protection, and development of all children. The *Convention* was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations towards the end of 1989 and came into force, with the necessary 20 ratifications, on the eve of the 1990 *World Summit for Children*. Usually, such conventions require many decades to achieve the stage of widespread international recognition; but in this case, the *Summit* urged all national governments to ratify as quickly as possible and more than 120 have so far done so.

Promises on paper

The importance of the *Convention*, the *Summit* goals, and the national programmes of action that have been drawn up should neither be overestimated nor underestimated. At the moment they remain, for the most part, promises on paper. But when, in the mid-1980s, over 100 of the world's political leaders formally accepted the goal of 80% immunization by 1990, that, too, was just a promise on paper. Today, it is a reality in the lives of tens of millions of families around the world.

One lesson to be learned from that achievement is that formal political commitments at the highest levels are necessary if available solutions are to be put into action *on a national scale*. But a second lesson is that such commitments will only be translated into action by the

dedication of the professional services; by the mobilization of today's communications capacities; by the widespread support of politicians, press, and public; and by the reliable and sustained support of the international community. Most of the countries that succeeded in reaching the immunization goal succeeded primarily because large numbers of people and organizations at all levels of national life became seized with the idea that the goal could and should be achieved. Many developing countries could provide examples, but it will be sufficient to cite the case of Bangladesh: against formidable difficulties, one of Asia's poorest and most populous countries succeeded in lifting its level of immunization coverage from only 2% in 1985 to 62% in 1990. "*Never in the country's history*," wrote a UNICEF officer in Dhaka, "*had so many groups come together for a single social programme: the President, eight social sector ministries, parliamentarians, senior civil servants, journalists, TV and radio, hundreds of non-governmental organizations, social and youth clubs, religious leaders, film and sports stars and local business leaders all worked successfully towards a common goal.*"

The question for the years immediately ahead is whether people and organizations in all countries and at all levels are prepared to breathe similar life into new goals that have been agreed on, and into the national programmes of action that have been drawn up for achieving them.

Many hundreds of organizations, especially in the developing world, are already beginning to respond to this challenge. In particular, many have come forward in support of the commitment made by their political leaders to achieve basic social goals by the end of this century. In some 70 countries, people's organizations of one kind or another have worked with governments in drawing up national programmes of action for achieving those goals.

These efforts are just a beginning; and when measured against the demands of the task in hand they are still only a very weak beginning. Not hundreds of organizations but thousands, not thousands of people but millions, will need to give their support to this cause if it is to become a matter of national and international priority.

To maintain the political momentum that has been generated, nothing less is now required than a worldwide strengthening of the basic needs movement to the point where it begins to exert the same kind of pressure as is today being brought to bear for the protection of the environment.

Such pressure will not be easy either to create or to sustain. A movement to overcome the worst aspects of poverty, and particularly to protect children, has no obviously powerful constituency and no immediate vested interest to appeal to. The environmental and women's movements are, in varying degrees, becoming everyone's concern, for the obvious reason that almost everyone is directly touched in one way or another by both of these issues. A movement to meet basic human needs will not succeed unless it, too, becomes everyone's concern. And to achieve that, the complex realities of common cause must also become more widely known and understood. None of the great issues that are assuming priority today - the cause of slowing population growth, the cause of achieving equality for women, the cause of environmentally sustainable development, the cause of political democracy - will or can be realized unless the most basic human needs of the forgotten quarter of the earth's people are

met. This cause, too, must therefore become the concern of all.

Only by this degree of popular participation, by the practical and political energies of literally millions of people and thousands of organizations, will the new commitments and the promises of the 1990s be given a priority in national life. And only by such means will a new age of concern be born.

Wider changes

All of these developments, and the hopes to which they have given rise, come at a time of extraordinary change in world affairs. And it is possible to hope that the cause of overcoming the worst aspects of poverty will also draw sustenance, for the long haul ahead, from the changed political and economic environment of the 1990s.

At the moment, that environment remains extremely difficult for most nations of the developing world. There is as yet no sign that the ending of the cold war is leading to any increase in the resources available for development. Indeed, much of the developing world is today facing its worst financial famine of the modern era, starved of resources by its own high levels of military spending, by the continuing debt crisis, by the further falls in commodity prices, by the restrictive trade policies of the industrialized nations, by the lingering recession in large parts of the world, by the costs of post-war reconstruction in the Persian Gulf, and by the channelling of new aid, credit, and investment to the nations of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

But despite all of these problems, the prospects for progress have been profoundly improved by the enormous political and economic upheavals of recent years: the advance of democracy throughout Latin America; the liberation of Eastern Europe; the collapse of the Soviet Union; the ending of the cold war; the spread of democratic political reform through most of Africa (including the erosion of apartheid); the almost world wide retreat from the ideology of highly centralized government control over all aspects of economic life; and the growing acceptance of the necessity of joint international action in response to both humanitarian and environmental problems.

These changes amount to one of the most rapid transformations in history. And for all the suffering that is surfacing in the turbulent wake of these changes, from Somalia to the former Yugoslavia, it can still be said that this is a transformation which holds out new hope for world development. If the various forms of free market economic policies now being adopted are not crushed under the weight of military spending, debt repayment, and trade protectionism, then there is real hope of achieving sustained economic growth. And if the steps now being taken towards democracy do not falter under the assault of continued poverty and social unrest, then there is also real hope that the poor will eventually begin to share more equitably in the benefits of that growth.

These developments are changing the overall environment in which the developing world must earn its living and within which its people must struggle to meet their own needs. Whether those needs are met or not depends, first of all, on whether families have jobs and incomes. Second, it depends on whether governments fulfil their responsibilities for providing the essential services and safety nets in support of families so that even the most disadvantaged do not suffer from preventable

malnutrition, from disease borne by unsafe water and sanitation, or from the lack of even basic health care and education. The great changes of the last five years by no means make such progress inevitable or automatic; but they do make it more possible and more likely.

This coming together of both general and specific developments means that a new threshold in the struggle to overcome the worst aspects of poverty has been reached in the early years of the 1990s. Broad-scale political and economic change is creating an environment more conducive to a renewal of progress against poverty; and advances in technology, in strategy, and in political commitment to meeting basic social goals have given that challenge both a specific focus and a new impetus.

Symptom and cause

Putting into practice today's low cost methods of overcoming malnutrition, disease, and illiteracy, will not solve the problems of economic development; it will not remove the burden of debt or restructure economic relationships; it will not bring an end to oppression and exploitation or eradicate the many causes of unemployment and low incomes; nor will it meet the legitimate aspirations of hundreds of millions of people in the developing world who are not living in absolute poverty but who do not enjoy the amenities of life that are taken for granted in the industrialized nations. It has therefore sometimes been argued that such specific, targeted interventions address only the symptoms of poverty and leave the causes undisturbed.

This is an argument which is no longer deserving of the politeness extended to it in the past. For it is an argument which fails to recognize that frequent illness, malnutrition, poor growth and illiteracy, are some of the most fundamental *causes* as well as some of the most severe symptoms of poverty. It fails, for example, to take into account that the pulse of economic development is weakened when millions of children suffer from poor mental and physical growth; that the march toward equality of opportunity is slowed when the children of the very poor drop out of school and into a lifetime of illiteracy; that the productivity of communities is enervated by hours spent carrying water from unsafe sources and by the time, energy, and health that is lost to the diseases it brings; that the prospects of finding a job and earning an income are crushed by preventable disabilities such as polio or nutritional blindness; that a family's capacity to save and invest in the future is the less when a child is born mentally retarded by iodine deficiency; and that the contribution of women to economic development cannot be liberated if women remain chained to long years of child-bearing, long days of attendance on illness, and long hours devoted to the fetching and carrying of water and fuel.

In these and many other ways, the worst symptoms of poverty help to crush the potential of the poor, to reduce their control over circumstance, to narrow the choices available to them, and to undermine the long-term process of development.

The struggle for social justice and economic development, both within and between nations, must continue - just as the poor themselves will continue to struggle, as they have always done, to meet most of their own needs by their own efforts. But it is a tragic mistake not to recognize that those efforts can be

enhanced by doing what can now be done to reduce disease, disability, malnutrition, illiteracy, and drudgery. Today's advances in knowledge and technology could therefore augment future prospects as surely as they could diminish present suffering. And the argument that making today's advances widely available is dealing only with symptoms is an argument as destructive to the future as it is insensitive to the present.

Finally, the great demographic change taking place in our times also adds its weight to the idea that the time is now right for a determined effort to overcome the worst aspects of poverty.

Fertility rates have fallen in almost every region of the world. In Latin America, the annual number of births has now begun to decline; in Asia, births will reach a peak in the mid-1990s and begin to fall; even in South Asia, a peak will be reached within a decade. Only in Africa will the annual number of births continue to rise until well into the next century. A historic turning-point in the modern era will therefore soon be reached. For once the annual number of births is stable or declining, any further investment in such services as health and education can be used to improve the quality of the services offered and to increase the proportion of people reached. In other words, the task of providing such services will no longer be a case of 'running to stand still', and the goal of meeting basic human needs will no longer be a target that is for ever moving away.

Twenty per cent for basics

As the end of the 20th century approaches, there is therefore an accumulation of reasons for believing that ending the worst aspects of poverty is an idea whose time may finally have come.

New strategies and low-cost technologies are available. Specific goals which reflect this potential have been agreed upon. The commitment to those goals bears the signatures of more Presidents and Prime Ministers than any other document in history. The plans for achieving them have been or are being drawn up in most nations. And there is a growing acceptance of the idea that targeting some of these worst effects of poverty, particularly as they affect children, is an essential part of long-term development strategy.

In the wider world, the ground being gained by democratic systems means that the long-starved concerns of the poor may begin to put on political weight. At the same time, economic reforms may also create the kind of environment in which a new effort to meet basic human needs would have a much greater chance of success. Meanwhile, the powerful tide of demographic change is also beginning to turn.

For all of these reasons, a new potential now exists for moving towards a world in which the basic human needs of almost every man, woman and child are met. But it is equally clear that this attempt will not gather the necessary momentum unless the political commitment is sustained and the extra resources begin to be made available.

If advantage is to be taken of the political commitments that have been made, and of the national programmes of action that have been drawn up, then those extra resources must begin to become available in the next 12 months to two years.

Some nations have already begun the pro-

cess of finding the necessary funds from their own resources. In most cases, this is almost certainly going to mean an increase in the proportion of government expenditures allocated to nutrition, primary health care, clean water, safe sanitation, basic education, and family planning services. UNICEF strongly supports the United Nations Development Programme's suggestion that at least 20% of government spending should be allocated to these direct methods of meeting priority human needs. If implemented, such a restructuring of government budgets would enable the developing nations as a whole to find several times the $25 billion a year that is needed to achieve the agreed goals.

In practice, such a shift in present patterns of resource allocation will not be easy to bring about. All governments, however well-intentioned, have limited room for manoeuvre as political pressures push them against the walls of economic constraint. Currently, the governments of the developing world as a whole are spending over one third of their combined budgets on the repayment of debt and on the financing of the military. Such distortions do not happen by accident. And the internal and external forces which have shaped such spending patterns will not disappear overnight. Nor will the pressure to devote disproportionate amounts of public resources to more advanced and more expensive health and education services for the wealthier and more influential sections of society.

But even in the face of all such pressures, it should be possible to allocate 20% of government spending to the task of helping the poor meet their needs for food, water, sanitation, basic health care, family planning, and the education of their children.

Restructuring aid

There remains the question of whether the industrialized nations are prepared to assist in this effort. Following the commitment made at the *World Summit for Children*, every developing country which draws up a detailed programme of action for reaching the agreed goals should now be able to expect that some proportion of the cost will be met by increased or reallocated aid. That proportion will vary from less than a quarter in East Asia and Latin America, to between a quarter and a half in South Asia, and up to two thirds in the least developed countries and sub-Saharan Africa. For the developing world as a whole, the additional external assistance required will be in the region of an additional $8 billion a year.

So far there is no significant sign that the industrialized nations are prepared to make additional resources available on this scale. Aid continues to stagnate. And there have been few serious attempts to restructure existing aid allocations. Government-to-government assistance cannot easily shuffle off the coil of foreign policy considerations, economic vested interests, and historical associations, which means that the richest 40% of the developing world's population receives twice as much aid per head as the poorest 40%. More positively, it would be a mistake to imply that all the aid not used for directly meeting basic human needs is irrelevant to this cause. Roads also help to meet basic needs. Jobs even more so.

But again, it is not too much to expect that 20% of development aid should be allocated to directly helping people to meet their most basic needs for food, water, health care, family planning and primary education. Such a restructuring of aid expenditures would, on its own, make available the extra $8 billion a year

required. It would be an increase in the kind of aid that the majority of people in the developing world want to receive, and in the kind of aid that the majority of people in the industrialized world want to give. And it is an increase which should now be offered to any developing country that commits itself to a programme of action to meet basic human needs.

The same commitment must also be expected from the multilateral organizations which currently disburse approximately $12 billion a year. In particular, the United Nations could play an increasingly central role in international efforts to achieve agreed social goals and to lay a new foundation for human development in the 21st century. And it is a role that could also provide a focus for the impending reform of the United Nations system and lead to the kind of changes which would make sense to, and meet with the approval of, a worldwide public.

The fading excuse

This opportunity must not be allowed to evaporate into the perennial atmosphere of pessimism about the prospects for world development. The necessary task of drawing attention to human needs has unfortunately given rise to the popular impression that the developing world is a stage upon which no light falls and only tragedy is enacted. But the fact is that, for all the set-backs, more progress has been made in the last 50 years than in the previous 2,000. Since the end of the Second World War, average real incomes in the developing world have more than doubled: infant and child death rates have been more than halved; average life expectancy has increased by about a third; the proportion of the developing world's children starting school has risen from less than half to more than three quarters (despite a doubling of population); and the percentage of rural families with access to safe water has risen from less than 10% to almost 60%. Yet even these statistics cannot capture the true dimensions of the change that has occurred in only a few decades. Much of the world has also rid itself of colonialism, brought apartheid in all its forms to the edge of extinction, and largely freed itself from the iron grip of fascist and totalitarian regimes. And underlying all of these changes is the slow and even more fundamental change from a world organized almost exclusively for the benefit of a privileged 10% or 20%, in almost all societies, to a world in which the needs and the rights of all people are increasingly recognized. Only a few decades ago, it did not seem a matter of great concern that the poor majority had no right to vote, no freedom of expression or religion, no right to due process of law, or that their children were not educated or immunized and received little or no benefit from advances in hygiene and health care. In many nations, it even seemed natural that the children of the poor could be sold or bonded or made to work 14 hours a day in field or mine or factory. And 50 years ago, when more than a million people starved in the Bengal famine, they died in a world which raised no murmur of protest.

Seen from this longer perspective, the fact that two thirds of the world's people now have the right to vote, or that 80% of the world's infants are immunized, or that there is such a thing as a worldwide *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, is a symptom of remarkable change. And in the face of such progress, pessimism is a sign less of sagacity than of cynicism. In the decade ahead, a clear oppor-

tunity exists to make the breakthrough against what might be called the last great obscenity - the needless malnutrition, disease, and illiteracy that still casts a shadow over the lives, and the futures, of the poorest quarter of the world's children.

It is almost unthinkable that the opportunity to reach these basic social goals should be missed because the political commitment is lacking or because the developing world and the donor nations cannot, together, find an extra $25 billion a year.

In the industrialized world, neither recession nor competing claims on resources can justify the failure to find the extra $8 billion a year which would be required to support developing nations that decide to make meeting basic social goals into a national priority.

In the developing world, underdevelopment is a fast-fading excuse for failure to make that commitment and to begin mobilizing the necessary financial and human resources.

The difficulties are enormous. But they shrink beside the difficulties that can be and have been overcome in the course of all the many great achievements of our times.

It is time that the challenge replaced excuse. If today's obvious and affordable steps are not taken to protect the lives and the health and the normal growth of many millions of young children, then this will have less to do with the lack of economic capacity than with the fact that the children concerned are almost exclusively the sons and daughters of the poor - of those who lack not only purchasing power but also political influence and media attention. And if the resources are not to be made available, if the overcoming of the worst aspects of poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy and disease is not to be achieved in the years ahead, then let it now be clear that this is not because it is not a possibility but because it is not a priority.

Conclusion

In 1992, many specific tragedies have again assaulted the very idea of childhood in such places as Somalia and the former Yugoslavia. The response to these tragedies, wherever they occur, is a major part of the work of UNICEF and is addressed in many other UNICEF publications and statements during the course of the year.

But for more than 10 years, the *State of the World's Children* report has concentrated on issues which profoundly affect far larger numbers of children but which do not constitute the kind of news event which qualifies for the world's attention. This is tragedy which does not happen in any one particular place or time; it happens quietly in poor communities throughout the developing world. It is therefore not news, and so it slips from the public eye and from the political agenda. But it is nonetheless a tragedy far greater in scale than even the greatest of the emergencies which so often command the world's, and UNICEF's, concern. No famine, no flood, no earthquake, no war, has ever claimed the lives of 250,000 children in a single week. Yet malnutrition and disease claim that number of child victims *every week*. And for every one of those children who dies, many more live on with such ill health and poor growth that they will never grow to the physical and mental potential with which they were born.

When little or nothing could be done about this larger-scale tragedy, then neglect was perhaps understandable. But slowly, quietly, and without the world taking very much notice, we have arrived at the point where this tragedy is

no longer necessary. It is therefore no longer acceptable in a world with any claim on civilization. The time has therefore come for a new age of concern.

Political and economic change in the world is beginning to create the conditions which, however difficult, offer new hope for overcoming the worst aspects of world poverty, particularly as they affect the world's children. The cost of providing health and education services in the developing world remains relatively low, and the gradual stabilization in the numbers of infants being born means that further investments in basic services can now begin to increase the proportion of the population served. Meanwhile, the technologies and strategies for controlling malnutrition, disease and illiteracy have been tried and tested and now stand waiting to go into action on the same scale as the problems they can so largely solve.

The convergence of all of these different forces means it is now possible to achieve one of the greatest goals that humanity could ever set for itself - the goal of adequate food, clean water, safe sanitation, primary health care, family planning, and basic education, for virtually every man, woman and child on earth.

In 1990, this new potential for specific action against these worst aspects of poverty was formulated into a set of basic social goals which accurately reflect that potential and which have been formally accepted by the great majority of the world's political leaders. A start has been made, in many nations, towards keeping the promise of those goals.

We therefore stand on the edge of a new era of concern for the silent and invisible tragedy that poverty inflicts on today's children and on tomorrow's world. Whether the world will enter decisively into that new age depends on the pressure that is brought to bear by politicians, press, public, and professional services in all nations. And among the readers of this report, there is hardly any individual or organization that could not now become involved.

The full text of the 1993 State of the World's Children report is available from all UNICEF offices or by writing to the Division of Information, UNICEF House, 3 UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA. The report is also published by Oxford University Press.